

# Changing Behaviour Through Challenges



THINKINGFOCUS

helping people get out of their own way

## Why this approach?

Every leader knows that making decisions when you cannot quantify the outcome is part and parcel of the job - the proverbial leap of faith. The toughest must be investing in people development. People development programmes promise much but deliver little because measuring behaviour change is so difficult.

From our past corporate roles, we know what it feels like to make decisions that matter and understand what accountability feels like to deliver various company goals, from sales to operational, from service to product development. So we appreciate what it means when you're asked to provide certainty in an uncertain world.



Our clients need to provide ROI when asking for spend. They need their investment decisions to pay off, and we wholeheartedly agree.

When we embark on client projects, we put ourselves in their shoes; we seek to understand what they need to achieve to justify the project's success. It is in our DNA; we focus our minds and efforts on building programmes that deliver ROI.

When we initially included business projects in our interventions, it was a mechanism to allow participants to practice their newly acquired skills. However, what emerged was a robust process built in an environment where participants were given permission to play. Participants felt empowered and motivated, which consistently translated into defining ambitious goals and achieving a demonstrable business impact. We have taken our learnings and built what we now know as our Challenge Project Methodology (CPM).

# What will this approach bring to the table?

Our aim with the CPM process is to:

- Transfer learning into meaningful business results through deliberate practice.
- Embed practical planning and problem-solving skills through practical application.
- Build strong internal relationships and cross-functional understanding.
- Create a common language and shortcuts to resolve issues and move forward quickly.
- Cut through organisational treacle by challenging unhelpful norms and assumptions.

We believe that teams and individuals get in their own way; it's not by choice; they get stuck with self-imposed limitations or organisational constraints.

CPM centres on a business challenge for participants to adopt and apply new thinking and skills. Clearly defined goals, creative and critical thinking, effective planning, and progress tracking lead to measurable outcomes that include business results and new behaviours. A mirror of what is expected in the day job.



## What is the Challenge Project Methodology?

The Challenge Project Methodology is crucial to the learning journey of participants. Participants apply their learning to meaningful business-related projects defined by the organisation. Senior stakeholders sponsor projects demonstrating a commitment to the process. Participants learn and gain access to senior people, which builds their exposure and personal profile among senior stakeholders. The sponsors provide direction to participants to ensure projects remain aligned with the business strategy and prevent duplication of effort.

Challenges are tailored to the business need and are incredibly flexible. They can be short 30-day sprints to 12-month projects. More typically, they last between 90 to 180 days.

The construct of a challenge project group is generally 3-5 people. Group size is vital to establish the right dynamic enabling the group to cope with the project and their day jobs while avoiding group members' social loafing (riding on the work of others). Participants typically expect some off-the-job time to dedicate to the project; however, this is a development opportunity, and participants should expect to give a little discretionary effort.

The ideal scenario is to match the right people with the right project, and they will fully immerse themselves in their project.



The challenge project methodology brings the following benefits:

- Deliberate practice embeds learning - participants apply their learning with reflective feedback, identifying areas for improvement and refinement.
- Applying new skills to a meaningful business project enables participants to utilise their skills in a safe space.
- Focus on meaningful business projects to generate ROI - choose to accelerate or kick-start projects, get unstuck on projects that have stalled or evaluate the viability of new projects before committing valuable resources.



The Programme Sponsor owns the entire programme and is accountable for its success; they are the main contact between Thinking Focus and the organisation and ensure that participants, sponsors and projects are organised and that roles, and expectations are clearly understood.

The Project Sponsors have a pivotal role in the process, providing arms-length support and guidance to the project groups without getting involved, influencing the team's thinking or telling them what to do. However, they need to ensure that project teams are not going off track and that what they work on is aligned to the business needs.



# Challenge Process

01

## Project Set-up

Define participants and sponsors who will take part in the process.

Sponsors are there to provide guidance and support where required and ensure efforts are not duplicated on key projects.

02

## Project Definition

Groups work together to understand the scope of the project and define a clear goal.

Sponsors provide insight, organisational context and share why it is important to the business.

03

## Virtual Check-in

Participants/groups provide an update to sponsors and invited guests.

Sponsors provide guidance and support where required and ensure efforts are not duplicated on key projects.

04

## Group Review

Participants/groups provide an update to sponsors and invited guests.

Sponsors provide guidance and support where required and ensure efforts are not duplicated on key projects.

05

## Project Review

Participants/groups share their results, learning journeys and realisations from the experience with an invited group of senior stakeholders and invited guests.

Sponsors provide support and any supporting commentary that adds to the learning of the groups.

## Conditions For Success

With over 20 years of running successful challenge projects, we identified what we now know as conditions for success. These are conditions that, when combined, significantly improve the likelihood of success:

### Challenge Projects

A meaningful and relevant challenge inspires participants to apply themselves, knowing that their work and contribution will add value to the organisation. There should be scope within the project for participants to use their knowledge and skills and avoid projects that are progressed internally and have strong beliefs attached to them unless the project is to challenge current assumptions and beliefs to achieve a breakthrough.

### Programme Owner

We recognise that any challenge project involves a significant commitment of time and money. However, having a programme owner accountable for the programme's success reduces the risk of participants, sponsors and resources being less likely to be sidetracked. In addition, this person plays a crucial role in mobilising and engaging sponsors, participants and internal stakeholders.

### Sponsors

Sponsor buy-in is crucial to the success of any challenge project; their hands-off role means they operate between mentor and coach. They should be available for the group but not drive the agenda. Instead, they provide headroom for project groups to grow whilst ensuring they align their efforts to organisational strategy and tactics and that activities do not duplicate the actions of other internal teams.

### Participants

Participants who attend with a clear personal purpose consistently perform better than those who are press-ganged into attending. In addition, they achieve more remarkable results when they understand how their contribution will make an impact and that they have 'permission to play'.

# Project Checklist - Conditions for Success

## Challenge Projects

- Are they meaningful and relevant to the organisation?
- Do they have the headroom and scope for participants to work on?
- Will participants be able to apply their new and existing knowledge and skills?

## Programme Owner

- Is there a programme owner accountable for the programme success?
- Can they engage participants and sponsors?
- Do they have the influence to mobilise internal stakeholders?

## Sponsors

- Are they bought into the project and committed to supporting their group?
- Are they able to coach and mentor?
- Do they have visibility of organisational strategy to minimise duplication of effort?

## Participants

- Invited, selected or applied - do they have a clear personal purpose for taking part?
- Do they feel safe to challenge and contribute to the programme?
- Have they been made aware of the discretionary effort expected?

# The Role of a Challenge Sponsor





## Why have a sponsor?

Sponsors are key roles on any project, and your role as a Challenge Sponsor is pivotal to the success of the business projects.

Challenge Sponsors are sounding boards and guides for their project groups, offering business insight, and helping to guide project groups to success.

As a Sponsor you will engage with a project group and help steer, guide, or challenge them along their journey. Our experience shows us that where project groups have an engaged Sponsor, they are far more successful than project groups who have little or no Sponsor involvement, with their projects delivering real business benefit.

As a Challenge Sponsor you are not there to do the work or tell the group what to do.

## What does the sponsor do?

- Help the group get clarity on the eventual outcome.
- Provide context and purpose; why this project is important for the business.
- Ensure the project group does not duplicate effort for other 'in-flight' projects.
- Keep the project group focused on solutions rather than problems.
- Challenge the project group's thinking, helping them to avoid groupthink.
- Empower people to "have a go", be "brave", and make change happen.
- Listen and be a sounding board.
- Open doors to relevant stakeholders/contacts.
- Make connections to other projects and initiatives happening across the business.
- Help the project group manage interference and unhelpful thinking from blockers at all levels.
- When required, involve others for support.
- Use failure as an opportunity to grow.





## **What's the commitment of a sponsor?**

You are there to support, not to do the work. You are the coach and, if appropriate, mentor to the group. Typically a sponsor role may take 30-mins to an hour a week, but that will depend on the project group.

# What's the end game?

An essential part of the challenge process is for challenge groups to present their journey back to fellow challenge groups, sponsors and special guests such as Senior Leaders. This process of reflection crystalises the tools, models and techniques they have acquired.

The presentation answers the following questions:

- What was their challenge?
- Why did they choose it?
- What goal did they define?
- How did they apply their learning to the project?
- What lessons did they learn along the way?
- How did they respond to failures and setbacks (if any)?
- What have they achieved?
  - business impact
  - potential business impact identified
  - recommendations
    - investment
    - change
    - improvement
    - next steps

## Challenge Project Methodology - Successes

- **New multi-million pound business formed**
- **Identified a business model**
- **Saved huge capital outlay**

An agricultural business used the challenge projects to embed their learning; two projects stick out.

The first project started as a proof of concept; the group were challenged to develop a go-to-market strategy. From this starting point, they worked on the project for six months and identified a target market and brand name. The result was the creation of a new business unit generating multi-million-pound profits for the group. It is now a separate limited company with its own P&L. The second project was to take a piece of hardware that had been developed to help dairy farmers increase the milk yield on their herd. The challenge they identified was that there was no market for the hardware, so the group initially felt that they had failed. However, they were challenged to think differently and looked at the challenge from an alternative perspective. They identified a market for the data that the hardware would collect, and they could commercialise the data, leading to a recommendation of a new subscription model. The result was not only had they saved the business a huge capital outlay on a product with no demand, but they converted it into a new business opportunity that led to the creation of a core profit-generating business unit.

A major UK bank adopted challenge projects to support their development programme. They set the 12 participants three challenges; one, in particular, was asked to look at savings for the bank.

They used our FooDo model to define clear goals and explore possibilities before investigating and analysing.

One group discovered an issue with their print template. Their printer would always print an extra irrelevant and unusable page whenever they printed documents. This bank printed millions of documents every year. The group calculated that the cost of wasted paper alone was over £35,000 every year, more than the programme cost!

The programme sponsor was delighted with the ROI from the programme, but what pleased them most was he saw his people take their new skills into the business. As a result, the quality of one-to-ones improved, employee engagement increased, and he saw a more collaborative cross-functional approach to problem-solving.

- **£35k annual savings**
- **Improved one-to-ones**
- **Better cross functional collaboration**
- **increased employee engagement**
- **66% reduction in call wait times**

## Challenge Methodology - Successes

A UK mortgage lender asked us to work with their high-potential group. They had 16 participants who came from across the business. They were developed with the Thinking Focus toolkit, which they were then asked to apply to projects across the group. They took on projects to drive savings, efficiencies and business improvements.

One group found £4m of additional resources for a £10k investment. Their systems were overloaded, causing their people unproductive time every day of over 70 minutes. Another group found their audit checking processes still had error rates despite 100% checking. This was a huge overhead and a significant risk to the business. The team worked with the audit team to remove the 100% checking and made people accountable for sign-off. Errors were dramatically reduced, and they saved over £100k per annum.

In his testimonial, the project sponsor said, "It reduced telephone calls by 30%, reduced operating costs by 25%, and improved the customer experience by reducing call wait times by two-thirds."

- £4m+ savings
- reduced errors
- 30% call reduction
- 25% reduction in operating costs
- 66% reduction in call wait times

- £103m in potential new revenues
- £30m micro business
- £3.5m in savings

A UK-based print supply, labelling, and print application company with global manufacturing and service hubs engaged us to build their global leadership programme (GLP) for 90 leaders worldwide. Some examples of challenges the groups faced included increasing consumable sales, delivering a channel market improvement plan and building a collaborative product-to-solution strategy.

Groups were developed over six months and achieved impressive results, including £103m in potential new revenues, a £30m turnover micro business, and £3.5m in savings. In addition, the company promoted several leaders.

The Group HRD and programme sponsor said, "Thinking Focus delivers programmes suited to a global commercial environment; relevant, well-paced and extremely practical. We engaged them to help us with our Global Leadership Programme because they were able to deliver a bespoke programme which perfectly fitted our objectives."

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